

Eternal Sunshine #7

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On the web at <http://www.whiningkentpigs.com> – follow the links to the **Diplomacy World** section for this subzine, old **Diplomacy World** articles (and soon - full issues in .pdf format), Message Board, Chat Room, and other items of interest.

Quote Of The Month – “Valentine's Day is a day invented by greeting card companies to make people feel like crap.” (Joel in “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind”, from which the title of this subzine was taken ... even though THAT title was taken from a line in an Alexander Pope poem. Actually the poem is “Eloisa to Abelard”, which is my fiancée Heather’s favorite love story: the doomed lovers Abelard and Heloise. Their story *is* romantic, even though I prefer ones where the man isn’t castrated.)

I’ve been meaning to put a subzine together for a while now, if for old time’s sake if for no other reason. The real question I kept coming back to is what the heck would I put in it? And more importantly, would anybody who reads **Abyssinian Prince** have the slightest interest in anything that ferments inside my sick mind?

Still, in my government-mandated therapy sessions, my therapist Stephanie is trying to help me motivate myself to do some of the semi-serious writing I have been considering on and off for years...things like my failed marriage and Mara’s mental illness, my experiences in prison, my childhood and my family. With those goals in mind, I figured spending a bit more time writing, even in this limited capacity, would have to be a good thing.

Besides all of that, I truly do miss some of the aspects of the PBM Diplomacy Hobby from when I was a much more active participant. Obviously, the hobby doesn’t even exist in the manner that it did during that period. Instead of thirty or more Dip zines being published, we have a handful. People who read Dipzines probably only get one or two (hell, at this point that’s half of what is available!). **Diplomacy World** is struggling, and I am not sure there is a hobby sector for it to be a flagship of if it wanted to. Avalon Hill is no longer the owner of Diplomacy, and I can’t even tell if Hasbro is planning on doing anything with it. The community aspect of the hobby is either erased or fractionalized. Back in the 90’s I felt a part of a family, or families: the Avalon Hill family, the PBM Diplomacy family, the Compuserve Diplomacy family, and the smaller family of zine publishers. I’ve got “Good Old Days” syndrome in a big way, don’t I?

I find myself wondering from time to time if there is a way to rebuild such a family. What I hope to do one day is restart my own zine, offering it in pdf and print versions, and scour the known universe for old Diplomacy players. Maybe by mixing the returning oldster with the younger generation there is a way to design a new community. Then again, maybe not...and who knows, maybe I won’t ever get around to starting that zine, or spinning this off into its own zine. Or I could start it in a few months! There are so many plans in my head, but it still remains to be seen how many I follow through on.

One thing I know I’m going to do is post this in PDF format on the Diplomacy section of my website. Then with that done, I will start posting links (or the file itself) everywhere else I can think of. I am also going to send out a slew of postcards or letters over the next 4 months to old hobby friends, in an attempt to track them down and if not get them into a game, at least get

them participating again and commingling with the new generation of internet Dippers. Probably a lost cause, but I'll give it a go.

In this rag, I plan on filling the pages with typical nonsense. My fiancée Heather and I go to a few movies every month, so I'll write up reviews of them. Sports and politics may make appearances, and a short letter column. Most of the books I read have been out for a while, but I will mention anything I read which really grabs me, and perhaps Heather will give brief reviews of what she reads (she goes through a few books a week it seems). Any hobby plans will be discussed, of course. And perhaps if I do eventually get any of my other writing done (oh PLEASE I need to get going on that), I will print excerpts here as well.

Game Openings

Diplomacy (Black Press): Nobody signed up yet. Needs seven.

Balkan Wars IV (Black Press): Nobody signed up yet. Needs seven. Rules and map on request.

Colonia VII_B (White Press): Fred Hyatt's worldwide variant. Nobody signed up. I need 9 players for this. Rules and map on request.

I would like to run a game or two. I just need some direction from the readership out there. Would anybody be interested in a game of Woolworth? Or Cline 9-Man? African Diplomacy? How about a bourse game? Suggestions are welcome. I'm also interested in getting a PBEM game of Avalon Hill's Advanced Civilization going (using their old PC software). I just found mine in my storage unit, and got it to work on XP with a DOS emulation program.

I'll be back next time with some thoughts on whatever is bouncing around in my skull. I still need to figure out my deadline schedule – it could run tied to the zine, with deadlines a few days before the normal **AP** ones, or I may choose to stick to my own schedule and do one turn every three or four weeks. Player input on these matters is welcome. I plan on including maps at least for the Diplomacy game, but we'll have to wait and see about Colonia and Balkan Wars. In the future I may offer some other multiplayer games too, like Kremlin or Enemy in Sight. In the meantime, here are some movie reviews from the films Heather and I went to see in January.

Last King of Scotland - By now I am certain you have heard all of the Oscar-buzz surrounding Forest Whitaker and his portrayal of Idi Amin in this film. Does he deserve to win? I am not sure, especially since I haven't seen some of the performances he is up against. But he does deliver a powerful screen presence in this film.

The movie is based on a fictional young Scottish doctor who leaves home to escape the boredom of joining his father in family practice. Randomly Dr. Nicholas Garrigan chooses Uganda as the place to "have an adventure." He arrives just as Idi Amin has taken power in a coup, but like everything else around him, Garrigan sees that as simply part of the canvas his adventure has been painted on. However, his populist Scottish side sees the crowds of celebrating citizens and hopes for true change within the government.

After working at a remote clinic for a short time (alongside another English doctor and his wife - played by The X-Files Gillian Anderson) by chance Garrigan is called upon to examine General Amin's hand after a car accident. He impresses Amin with his enthusiasm and outspokenness so

much that Amin offers him the position as his personal physician. At first turning him down, Garrigan has second thoughts and decides to accept.

From this very personal vantage point we are witness to Amin's violent ways, his mental instability - and his immense charm. Garrigan watches as the walls begin to close in on Amin's regime and on himself, yet Amin's charisma make it hard for him (like the rest of the world) to believe the horrible things he hears from the outside world. It isn't until Garrigan becomes personally involved in the removal of a supposed Amin foe - and until he is forced to view photos of the atrocities taking place all over the county - that he is convinced the cause he had tried to hard to believe in was more of what Africa had suffered through for years: ruling parties enriching themselves, killing their opponents, and ignoring the general population.

Little of the actual killing Amin is responsible for shows up on screen. But the violence is all around Garrigan, and around us, until we feel like we are stuck in a war zone with little hope of escape.

The film is suspenseful, enlightening, and powerful...not as powerful as Whitaker, but still worth seeing. I give it a B+.

Flannel Pajamas - I was first introduced to this movie by seeing the trailer every time we went to see a movie at The Angelika in the past month or two. That trailer captured my attention for two reasons: the intensity and honesty I saw on the faces of the actors, and the over modulation of the musical score which rang to the point of distortion. Regardless, it seemed clear this was a movie we were going to go see when it came out. A talky movie following a failed relationship? Sounded like my life (a few times over)!

I suppose how much you enjoy this movie depends on what you expect to get out of it. There is no great resolution, no massive personal growth or moment of sudden clarity. Like any relationship which ends, it all depends on how you look at it. You can continue to expand the picture until it all loses focus, or you can narrow in on single moments. There is no right and wrong.

The film follows the relationship of Stuart and Nicole (Justin Kirk and Julianne Nicholson) from meeting on a blind date to dating to marriage and ultimately to separation. Stuart basically sets the stage for the relationship when he declares at the first date that neither he nor Nicole is "evil" (a term he uses to describe Nicole's best friend). He's right - they aren't, they are two kind people who love each other (in some ways) and who want to build a life with each other. Yet throughout the film it becomes clear that love alone is not enough to sustain a relationship. Much like real life, the film is a collection of scenes where people do what they feel is right at the time, even what they think will be right in the future...but good intentions can't erase the facts that often we develop relationships with people who simply aren't suited for us. A successful relationship requires love, commitment, hard work, understanding, and more than anything similar direction and similar priorities.

Maybe Stuart and Nicole are both a bit too selfish - they both seem to act out of pure self-interest, Nicole using "I want" frequently and Stuart setting down his own rules and agendas and expecting Nicole to follow them. Perhaps they each carry too much baggage. They both give in to each other without really meaning it, the kind of actions which result in built-up resentment. More than anything, I noticed that the characters refuse to cry in front of each other. To me, that was enough to doom the relationship.

In a Q&A session after the film, writer/director Jeff Lipsky explained that they deleted more than 50 scenes in an effort to keep both characters on a rather even playing field. His greatest reward is that people leave the theatre arguing over who is more to blame for the failure of the relationship. And those arguments are not split by gender. In the end, there is more than enough blame to go around. The story is about 50% quasi-autobiographical, but the most

powerful scenes are fictional (such as the conversation between mother-in-law and son-in-law in the cafeteria).

The performances are all strong, and particular attention is paid to Stuart's brother Jordan (Jamie Harrold), who is mentally unstable and quite flamboyant, often overshadowing his sibling. I'm a bit too much like that character though, and with a nice collection of funny lines he is the hardest to dislike. Personally I preferred the performances of Nicholson and of her mother (played by Rebecca Schull).

Overall the film is quite good, certainly successful in its own way, and it stays with you...some people might not appreciate that, but I do. As Mr. Lipsky says, he wanted to give you "something to chew on". He accomplishes that, and more.

Oh, and as the credits ran, there was the same haunting song from the trailer...and the damn thing was STILL over modulated to the point of semi-distortion.

The Painted Veil - How best to describe this film? Set in 1920's China, while Britain still trying to hold onto control of a colony while revolution (or at least self-rule) continues to seem more likely, the story is really a love tale of sorts. Produced by and starring Edward Norton and Naomi Watts, the backdrop of China reflects the state of their relationship as husband and wife - at moments peaceful and beautiful, at others dangerous and violent, and at others terrifying and full of despair.

Norton plays Dr. Walter Fane, a bacteriologist civil servant stationed in Shanghai. In England for a short time, he proposes to the beautiful Kitty (Naomi Watts) who is feeling stifled and bored by society's rules, and more so is looking for any opportunity to get away from her household and her overbearing mother. The couple returns to China, quickly to discover that they have very little in common. Kitty is playful and talkative, while Walter is quiet and studious. But he does love her, and Walter does what he can to make her happy despite how uncomfortable he is in both public and private social situations.

Looking for a thrill, Kitty begins an affair with Vice Consul Charles Townsend (Liev Schreiber). Walter quickly learns of the adultery and gives Kitty a choice (after revealing to her the less-than-honest nature of Townsend's affections) - accept a scandalous divorce, or accompany him to inland China where he has volunteered his services to help fight the worst Cholera epidemic seen in some time.

Surrounded by the despair and death and misery of the ravaged village, but within the backdrop of the beauty of the glorious lands around them, the couple has to learn to find strength within themselves, while in the process discovering that while their initial expectations of each other may have been foolish, there is much to admire - and love - within the complicated facets of a human being.

Diana Rigg of Avengers fame makes an appearance as the Mother Superior of the local convent, and Toby Jones is steady throughout as a British civil servant determined to do his duty despite how miserable the situation may be. But somehow this film finds ways to rise above the dank depths of death and despair, and instead offers hope that while love may not be able to conquer all, it can certainly bring happiness into an otherwise unhappy life.

Perfume: The Story of a Murderer - Nothing about this movie makes a lot of sense, which is too bad because I generally enjoyed it...and with some changes I might have REALLY enjoyed it.

Tom Tykwer (who you may know from the interesting and visually successful Run Lola Run) directs this tribute to olfactory experiences - smells, to be blunt. The main character, Jean-Baptiste, overcomes the odds as a newborn orphan and grows into adulthood. As he ages, he

realizes he possesses the most precise sense of smell in the world, and finds joy in every odor whether the general population would classify them as *good* smells or *BAD* smells.

Eventually he finds his most consuming scent - that of a human female - and he becomes obsessed with trying to find a way to preserve...discovering by accident that the marvelous perfume of a human body disappears once we are dead. With assistance from a has-been perfume legend (played wonderfully and lightly by Dustin Hoffman) Jean-Baptist learns the various perfume methods for distilling and preserving scents. He is then set to begin his life's work - the development of the greatest perfume ever invented, which unfortunately requires the sacrifice of a number of female victims to accomplish.

It should be difficult to translate his extraordinary thrill of everyday scents to a visual medium, but Tykwer does a masterful job, bringing to light the immense beauty in the colors and textures of life at the same time. Whether it is the curve of a neck, the shiny skin of smelly fresh fish, or a frog laying eggs, we see with our eyes the majesty Jean-Baptiste absorbs with his nose.

As I said, very little of this movie makes sense, from the unnecessary addition of "The Story of a Murderer" to the title to the final 30 minutes (including two or three scenes which are just SO DUMB that the movie is nearly ruined in the process). But if you can work your way around that and enjoy the remainder, I guess you could do worse than see this film. At least you'll find something to talk about afterward. Besides, the information on the art of perfumery is by itself a very interesting and enlightening added bonus.

Children of Men - If you are looking for some light, uplifting entertainment to cheer you up after a bit too much New Year's Eve celebrating, "Children of Men" is NOT the movie to choose. But if you don't mind feeling anxious and shell-shocked, there is more to like than dislike in this new film directed by Mexican native Alfonso Cuaron.

The movie centers on Theo, played by Clive Owen. The year is 2027, and no babies have been born in nearly 20 years. The world is in turmoil. No explanation for why every woman is infertile has been found. All the major global powers have collapsed in chaos, except for England which is hanging on despite a flood of illegal immigrants - most of whom are kept housed in pens or prison-style ghettos reminiscent of Warsaw in World War II - and anti-government terrorists (or revolutionaries, depending on which side you're on). Theo works for the Department of Energy, and is contacted by his ex-wife (Julianne Moore) looking for help smuggling an immigrant to the coast - who Theo learns is 8 months pregnant. Thus begins a violent and suspenseful journey for Theo as he tries to avoid both the government and the radicals (each of whom would like to use the baby for their own purposes).

It's hard to describe the feeling I had watching this movie. The violent scenes were similar to "Saving Private Ryan", while the complete chaos sort of a cross between a modern police state and "28 Days Later." I don't want to give any more plot points away, but in some respects I felt more as if I survived this movie than enjoyed it. Still, it's pretty good, and mixes despair, hope, and continued effort despite which one is stronger in a very effective fashion. Michael Caine gives a solid performance as a sort of hippy friend who lives out in the woods, and Clive Owen is at the least adequate.

Go see it, I give the movie a B or a B+, but be in a serious mood before you go, if for no other reason than you'll be feeling serious enough when you walk out.

**Deadline For The Next Issue of Eternal Sunshine:
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